

Fall 8-15-2012

ENG 3001-002: Advanced Composition

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Recommended Citation

Leddy, M, "ENG 3001-002: Advanced Composition" (2012). *Fall 2012*. 79.
http://thekeep.eiu.edu/english_syllabi_fall2012/79

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Office hours: MWF 10:00–11:00,
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We will practice the art of writing—sentences, paragraphs, essays—with as much room for improvement as a semester allows. Some writing will be on assigned topics; some, on topics of your devising. Some writing will be practical; some will involve the mind at play. All work in the course will emphasize revision as a necessary practice in writing. (I've made fifteen small revisions in writing this description.)

In the world beyond college, you'll be the one responsible for the shape your writing skills are in. This course provides a great opportunity to get those skills in better shape now.

TEXTS

Claire Cook, *Line by Line*
Gerald Graff, et al. *"They Say/I Say"*
Michael Harvey, *The Nuts and Bolts of College Writing*
John Trimble, *Writing with Style*
Virginia Tufte, *Artful Sentences*

Other reading will be available as PDFs or photocopies.

You should have access to a hardcover collegiate (college-level) dictionary when reading.

REQUIREMENTS

The course will require dedicated daily work (reading, writing, sharing work, talking), several pieces of writing, and several conferences.

ATTENDANCE

Be here, on time, every time. You're responsible for all assignments, whether or not you're here when

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ADVANCED COMPOSITION

PROFESSOR M. LEDDY

FALL 2012



they're announced.

Frequent absences will affect your grade, not through a system of points and deductions but simply because not being here will make it difficult to do the work of thinking and learning that a college course is meant to involve. If you must miss a class, you should get in touch with me beforehand to find out what you will miss.

Photocopied pages to go with our reading will be available from an envelope on my office door.

LATE WORK, MAKE-UP WORK

Missed work cannot be made up. Late work is acceptable only if you have my approval in advance.

DISABILITIES

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, contact the coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

OFFICE HOURS

Talking to professors is one of the smartest things a college student can do. Please, come in to ask questions and talk about your work in the class. If office hours don't work for you, make an appointment.

If you feel uneasy about talking to professors, read "How to talk to a professor" for potentially helpful advice: goo.gl/VYSkv.

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Leddy

E-MAIL

Before you e-mail me, please read and follow the guidelines in "How to e-mail a professor": goo.gl/4n6EH. These guidelines are read all over the world and will serve you well in e-mailing any professor (assuming that your professor answers e-mail).

One guideline that you don't need to follow: you need not add your class number and meeting time to your signature. I'll know who you are. But do include ENG 3001 in your subject line. That makes it easier for me to sort mail and respond to it in a timely way.

DECORUM

The atmosphere in our class should be serious—not somber or pretentious, but collegiate and genuinely intellectual. No eating, sleeping, talking, texting, or doing work for other classes. No headphones, hoods, iPods, or phones. Electronic devices should be turned off and out of sight. Please show proper respect for our small community of learning.

DISCUSSION

Consider what the writer Thomas Merton says about a teacher he admired (Mark Van Doren, Columbia University):

Most of the time he asked questions. His questions were very good, and if you tried to answer them intelligently, you found yourself saying excellent things that you did not know you knew, and that you had not, in fact, known before.

I like to ask questions that make people think. I also like it when people ask me such questions. Think of an in-class question not as one whose answer you're already supposed to know but as an invitation to think. I know that this suggestion might go against the grain of much of your experience in school. You should be

asking relevant questions too, of me and perhaps of one another. Asking questions is what's involved in critical inquiry.

One more observation on discussion, from the cultural critic Randolph Bourne:

A good discussion increases the dimensions of every one who takes part. Being rather self-consciously a mind in a group of minds means becoming more of a person.

As you can guess, I'm optimistic about discussion.

For more on questions and discussion, read "How to answer a question": <http://goo.gl/DlzaG>. (That's a capital I after the D.)

GRADING

Your grade will be based on your writing (70%), day-to-day work (20%), and participation in class and conferences (10%).

Longer writing receives a letter grade. Day-to-day assignments receive numerical grades. Missing work of either sort receives a zero. Participation and conferences receive an numerical grade, an overall evaluation of the extent to which you're prepared and contributing: 100 (always), 85 (frequently), 75 (usually), 50 (sometimes), 0 (rarely or never).

To calculate semester grades, I use numerical equivalents for letter grades:

A	95	A-	92	B+	87
B	85	B-	82	C+	77
C	75	C-	72	D+	67
D	65	D-	62	F	55

Sometimes when I grade writing I'll give a grade that falls between two grades—e.g., B+/A- (89.5).

For semester grades, 90 or above is an A; 80 or above, a B; 70 or above, a C; 60 or above, a D; below 60, an F.

EWP

Please make sure that you understand the requirements for the Electronic Writing Portfolio and that you fulfill them in a timely way. For more information: www.eiu.edu/~assess/.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The English Department's statement on plagiarism:

Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—"The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and the representation of them as one's original work" (*Random House Dictionary of the English Language*)—has the right and responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course.

And my statement concerning academic integrity:

Any breach of academic integrity—from lifting words or ideas without attribution to submitting a wholly unoriginal essay—is a serious matter and will get you a serious penalty. The Student Standards office recommends an F for the course. You will also be required to take a course in ethics administered by Student Standards, whose staff will keep your misconduct on record and notify your other professors that one of their students has violated academic integrity.

You should be familiar with Eastern's statement on academic integrity and should ask if you have any questions about quoting from and/or documenting sources. But because the work of the course is to be an expression of *your ideas in your words*, aside from words and ideas from properly acknowledged sources, questions of plagiarism and collusion should never arise.

Do not "borrow" work or give your work to anyone (allowing someone

else to make use of your work is also a breach of academic integrity and will also get you a serious penalty, up to and including an F for the course).

PROVISIONAL OUTLINE (WEEKS)

- 1: Thinking about writing
Zinsser, "Writing Good English"
- 2: Harvey, Trimble
- 3: Graff, Harvey, Trimble
- 4: Readings on Facebook, conversation, and loneliness; first writing
- 5: Conferences
- 6: Harvey, Trimble, readings on writing and the workplace
- 7: Sentence work, second writing
- 8: Conferences
- 9: Readings on college and its discontents
- 10: Tufte, third writing
- 11: Conferences
- 12: Readings on academic integrity
- 13: Fourth writing, conferences
- 14: Repairs (revising)
- 15: Fifth writing, last things

ONE LAST THOUGHT

There is really only one way to learn good writing: through good reading and extensive writing and revising.

Robert Lane Greene, *You Are What You Speak: Grammar Grouches, Language Laws, and the Politics of Identity* (Delacorte 2011).

FIND A GOOD TIME AND PLACE TO WORK

Find a time and place that allow you to read and write with real attention. The more time you spend in your spot, the more it'll become associated with the work of reading and writing.

Work smart: silence your phone and turn off the wi-fi when you're reading or writing. Give yourself a fighting chance to pay attention to the work at hand.

BE AN ACTIVE READER

Read with a pen or pencil in hand, to mark up the reading (if appropriate) and/or make notes. Read with the questions that go out with reading assignments. Think of the work of reading not as a matter of absorbing information but as a matter of actively engaging and working out a writer's meaning.

Good readers understand that reading is a matter of practice, hard work, and rethinking. It's meant to take time. Here are some wonderful observations about reading from a recent interview with the British novelist Zadie Smith:

But the problem with readers, the idea we're given of reading is that the model of a reader is the person watching a film, or watching television. So the greatest principle is, "I should sit here and I should be entertained." And the more classical model, which has been completely taken away, is the idea of a reader as an amateur musician. An amateur musician who sits at the piano, has a piece of music, which is the work, made by somebody they don't know, who they probably couldn't comprehend entirely, and they have to use their skills to play this piece of music. The greater the skill, the greater the gift that you give the artist and that the artist gives you. That's the incredibly unfashionable idea of reading. And yet when you practice reading, and

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SEVEN WAYS TO DO WELL



you work at a text, it can only give you what you put into it.

BE WILLING TO IMPROVE

Many students come into an English class thinking that their ability to do the work is somehow set for all time. Hence the familiar statement: "I'm not a very good writer." Or even worse: "I can't write." All evidence though suggests that human ability—of every sort—is not fixed but fluid. So think of this class as an opportunity to get better at the skills involved in reading and writing. In doing so, you will be working on survival skills: your ability as a reader and writer can open doors of all sorts for you in the world beyond college.

A syllabus from the great American writer David Foster Wallace (1962-2008) speaks for all college professors who care about writing:

If you want to improve your academic writing and are willing to put extra time and effort into it, I am a good teacher to have. But if you're used to whipping off papers the night before they're due, running them quickly through the computer's Spellchecker, handing them in full of high-school errors and sentences that make no sense, and having the professor accept them "because the ideas are good" or something, please be informed that I draw no distinction between the quality of one's ideas and the quality of those ideas' verbal expression, and that I will not accept sloppy, rough-draftish, or

semiliterate college writing.

BE HERE

On time, every time. "Being here" means being here for the full time. Don't pack up early; it's distracting and just makes it more difficult to get to the ending. The amount of time we have together as a class is remarkably small, and we need all of it.

BE PREPARED

No matter what Woody Allen says, ninety percent of life is not just showing up. Come in having done whatever work is due that day. Have the work we're doing at hand, along with a notebook and a writing instrument.

BE ENGAGED

When we talk, make some relevant contributions. When we have "conferences" (a strangely inflated word for one-to-one conversations about your work), come in ready to talk about the work at hand. Come in during office hours too. One of the surest ways not to do well in the class is to *just sit there*.

RULE 7

Rule 7: "The only rule is work. If you work, it will lead to something. It's the people who do all of the work all the time who eventually catch on to things."

I found this "rule" years ago in a photograph of an informal running list of rules, some serious, some not, made by the students and faculty of a college art department. I think that what Rule 7 says is absolutely true—for making art and for any kind of learning. The only *necessary* thing is work. (That doesn't mean that there can be no fun.) The simplest way to do well in this course is to do all the work that there is to do. If you do so, you'll learn things, and good results should follow.